





THE DISPENSATION

AND OTHER PLAYS

BY

CLAY M. GREENE

11

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK

PS 1764
G 282

Copyright, 1914
BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

APR -4 1914



\$1.00

©Cl.A371249

no,

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

This little book is published only because good friends in The Lambs who liked the plays when they heard them at club gambols, suggested it. So I dedicate it to them for what it is worth, in the hope that their judgment was not misplaced, should others, not so friendly, happen to read it.

C. M. G.

“The Dispensation” may not be used for public presentation except by special arrangement with the author.

THE DISPENSATION

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

HIS HOLINESS THE POPE.

CARDINAL SITELLI.

CARDINAL RAVENNA.

JOSEPH VESTANI, a Missionary Priest of Roumania.

THE DISPENSATION

SCENE.— *Private Audience Chamber of His Holiness the Pope, a dignified solemn room with hangings of deep red, and embroidered with the Papal insignia. The Papal throne is on a low dais on L. of stage, over which is a heavy canopy of red, emblazoned with the Papal insignia in gold. There is an arched doorway C. with heavy curtains and a door R. similarly closed with draperies. Above the R. D. is a small altar, with golden crucifix and lighted candles. At rise of curtain, Cardinal Sitelli is discovered kneeling in prayer at the altar. When the curtain is up, he rises, crosses himself, and goes a little to L. At the same time Cardinal Ravenna enters hastily R. and stops on seeing Sitelli. Sitelli is of severe and saturnine countenance, while Ravenna is quite the reverse, being rotund of form, and pleasant in demeanour.*

Ravenna [somewhat anxiously]. Well, Cardinal?

Sitelli [moodily]. You have won.

Ravenna. Then His Holiness has granted an extraordinary audience with my young friend?

Sitelli. He has, against my earnest protestation.

Ravenna. And you continued to oppose it, after the long and painful conference which decided nothing?

Sitelli. I did, earnestly and vehemently. [*Down to L. C.*]

Ravenna. Since a tie vote of the Cardinals left the matter of Joseph Vestani's appeal entirely in the hands of the Holy Father, may I ask why you still continue your opposition?

Sitelli. Must I answer now, or will you be so polite as to first grant me a reply to a question of my own?

Ravenna [*obsequiously*]. Politeness, my dear Cardinal, is so often a cloak for duplicity, that I shrink from being so impolite as to cavil at any wish of my superior. [*This speech is finished by a low bow.*]

Sitelli [*eyeing him severely*]. That's duplicity.

Ravenna [*smiling*]. Am I so transparent then? Ah, well! Had I been perfect, who knows but I might have been mentioned for the Holy See myself?

Sitelli [*proudly*]. I have been so mentioned twice.

Ravenna. I remember that distinctly. But then you *are* perfect, my lord Cardinal.

Sitelli [*with a searching glance*]. I remember something else.

Ravenna. Something that I may hear?

Sitelli. Oh, yes. I was not perfect enough then for you to support me.

Ravenna [*as if taken unawares, and trying to change the subject*]. Er—the question you spoke of just now,—what was it? I will answer without reserve.

Sitelli. Who is this young and obscure Missionary Priest from Roumania, who can secure a private audience with His Holiness, when older and better servants of the Church have been turned away?

Ravenna. Older perhaps, but there *are* no better servants of the Church than Joseph Vestani, my Lord Cardinal. And, he is not obscure.

Sitelli. How do you know all that?

Ravenna. So many questions without one reply, cannot but confuse us both. Joseph Vestani of Bukharest, scion of a noble Catholic family, which for centuries, has squandered its millions and shed its blood in the service of the Cross, forsook the religion of his fathers, renounced power, political distinction, military glory, the lust of the flesh and the lures of fame, to become a priest of the Church.

Sitelli. Lusts of the flesh? He has them now.

Ravenna. Oh, undoubtedly. That is why he seeks a dispensation, whereby he may exchange the vows and vestments of a priest for those of the bridegroom.

Sitelli. *Mirabile dictu!* And you a confidential member of the Papal household, actually approved of it!

Ravenna. Just as sincerely as I dared to regret the last dispensation, permitting two divorced people to marry.

Sitelli. The woman was an infidel. That kind of dispensation was instituted by St. Paul himself, and saved to Rome a great and powerful family, that otherwise might have united itself with the Greek Church.

Ravenna. And to have denied it, would have — temporarily at least — cast a stigma over the lives of two children.

Sitelli [*with much indignation*]. No stigma can possibly attach to any act of the head of the Church of Rome.

Ravenna. I did not say so.

Sitelli. You implied it.

Ravenna. Come, come, come, be just,— I did not do that either. What I meant was —

Sitelli. I'll listen to no more of your heresies! [*Goes up stage L. and turns.*] Such worldliness as yours has no place here in the Vatican.

Ravenna [*shrugging his shoulders, and crossing to L.*]. Nevertheless, the Holy Father has seen fit to admit the worldly Ravenna into his family and his councils.

Sitelli. Why one might almost suspect that

you had been a victim of the lusts of the flesh yourself.

Ravenna. The lusts, yes,—I confess that. But never once the gratification of them.

Sitelli. I see no difference.

Ravenna. Because your world-vision and mine are reflected through different lenses, my Lord Cardinal. There *is* a difference, broad as the range of heresy, between the evil thought and the false step. But you don't know that, because you have never been,—let me be humanly material and say, in love.

Sitelli. Thanks be to God no!

Ravenna. I have. That is why my heart is with this young Roumanian in his burning desire to be absolved from such a life as my priesthood was as the first.

Sitelli. You regret your priesthood?

Ravenna. No one knows how little, better than yourself, my dear Cardinal. Think you His Holiness regrets his? And yet the veins of his youth-time days were thrilled by love. You heard him acknowledge it in open council, with reference to the prayer of Joseph Vestani. [*A bell beyond the draperies C. strikes three.*]

Sitelli. Hush! It is the hour announced for the audience. [*Ravenna hurries off R.—after making his obeisance at the altar. Sitelli goes through the curtains of the back opening, there*

is a moment's pause, Sitelli returns, the curtains part disclosing His Holiness, and Sitelli offers his left arm. His Holiness rests on Sitelli's arm, and is led slowly to the throne. Arriving at the throne, Sitelli kneels, receives the Papal blessing, and then His Holiness sits.]

His Holiness. You may rise, my son. [*Sitelli rises.*] The young Roumanian Missionary is here?

Sitelli. Awaiting your august pleasure, Holy Father.

His Holiness. You may announce that I am ready to receive him.

Sitelli. May I not serve your Holiness in some way before that?

His Holiness. No, my son. We have had long and earnest conference, then conference again, and they availed nothing. I had thought the case was vital enough to God and the Church, to have made Him willing to respond to our prayers by unfolding our whole duty before us. This He has not seen fit to do, for my council was of many minds and He has left it for me to decide alone.

Sitelli. What else was to be done, Holy Father? You submitted the case to the Cardinals and the vote was even.

His Holiness. There were prejudices without explanation, opinions without reason, statements without evidence to support them.

Sitelli. Surely, Holy Father, I was —

His Holiness. Best perhaps on one side. Ravenna best on the other. For that I have summoned you both, to consider with me the prayer of the suppliant again. Ah, my son, feeble is the authority that hesitates on vital things, and I am feeble, for in my heart I wish that this dispensation might be granted, and yet both God and my conscience refuse to point me out the way.

Sitelli. Have we not tried —

His Holiness. Yes, my son, and failed. You may call Father Vestani. [*Sitelli kneels, receives the Papal blessing, rises, and backs humbly across to R. C. when he makes obeisance to the altar and disappears through the curtains R. His Holiness crosses himself, folds his hands on his breast, and his lips move as if in prayer. The curtains R. part and Sitelli, Vestani and Ravenna enter. Sitelli takes his place near a chair up L. Vestani kneels near the door R. and Ravenna stands to his right down stage.*]

Ravenna. Father Vestani, your Holiness.

His Holiness [*extending his right hand with a smile*]. Approach, my son. [*Vestani rises, crosses to the throne and kneels at the feet of His Holiness, who holds out his hand and Vestani kisses it reverently after having received the blessing. As the Pope speaks, his face seems to be lighted by a smile of greater encouragement.*] You may rise.

Vestani. You smile, Holy Father. My prayer is granted after all!

His Holiness. No, my son. For the second time the Council has disagreed.

Vestani. It is hopeless then?

His Holiness. Before the Sacred Tribunal of the Holy Church, no wavering cause is hopeless until judgment has been pronounced. And this cause must waver until God in his infinite wisdom shall have disclosed to me what is right. You may rise. [*Vestani rises, and His Holiness turns to Sitelli.*] A chair for my son, Sitelli.

Vestani [*in a tone of reverent surprise*]. What, seated in the presence of the Pope of Rome!

His Holiness. It must not be Pope and suppliant now, Joseph,—nor judge and petitioner,—but man speaking to man. The Prelate is Nature's son again, and asks from one of Nature's children, guidance and instruction.

Vestani. Guidance to where, Holy Father,—instruction in what?

His Holiness. Man to man, I said, Joseph, and if there be in your throbbing soul anything that may teach me my duty, I wish you to open it to me bravely, fearlessly.

Sitelli. Most unusual, your Holiness.

His Holiness. His cause is unusual. For the first time since I have been head of the Church, her Canons and my conscience are in discord. Sit

down, Joseph, I wish it. [*Vestani sits in the chair which Sitelli has placed in front of the throne L. C. with an expression of wonderment on his face.*]

Speak first, Sitelli, and be brief. Why were you so bitter in your protest against this dispensation?

Sitelli. I stand upon the letter and the spirit of the Canons of the Church! I recognise no other laws, least of all those of Humanity, for I hold that they are all evil. With my vows died the heart of material man, and his soul entered my spiritual body, there to remain, until purged of sin, it shall be bidden to its seat at the throne of God. On this ground I stand, Holy Father, now as I have stood from the first!

His Holiness [to Ravenna]. You opposed the Cardinal in Council, Ravenna. With more earnestness, eloquence, too, than I had noticed in you before. Why was that?

Ravenna [coming over to the chair on which Vestani is sitting and placing his hand upon it]. Because, Holy Father, I do not believe that all of Nature's laws are evil, nor that man is necessarily accursed, because in his God-given weakness, one of those laws moves him to waver in his allegiance to those that are wholly spiritual. As no man is without sin, neither is he free from those weaknesses born of the flesh, and which it is but human to encourage. Conscience is the great ruler of what is material or spiritual in man. So, if conscience tell him that the flesh is stronger in

the soul than his allegiance to spiritual things, and he confess it not to God, through the ministers of God, then he lies to God! On this point I stand, your Holiness.

His Holiness. Neither of you spoke so convincingly in the Council and yet said more. Enough, my sons, I thank you. Leave us alone together. [*Sitelli and Ravenna approach the throne to receive the blessing in turn, after which they make obeisance to the altar, and bow their way out R. Vestani sits in the chair, his eyes upon the ground. His Holiness looks upon him as though waiting for him to speak first, and when Vestani's eyes meet his, he makes a sign to him to indicate that he may speak.*]

Vestani. Your eyes seem to reflect hope, Holy Father, just as your words were full of encouragement.

His Holiness. Do not misunderstand me, my son. My words were kindly only, and my eyes reflected sympathy rather than hope.

Vestani. My prayer is denied then?

His Holiness. I have not said that. My office has already made its decision. That commands me to be unalterably opposed to a recall of the vows of a priest of God. But, as I have said, for the first time, my manhood's conscience cries out: "Be just, humanity too has its rights." This I say, Joseph, in spite of the holy Canons, whose chief upholder and adjudicator I am chosen to be.

Vestani. Holy Father, that is hope.

Holiness. Again I warn you not to think so. I must first be just to the Almighty.

Vestani. I never dared to hope for anything else, Holy Father. I would not exact it if I could.

His Holiness. Then speak freely and with firm courage, son Joseph, remembering my first injunction:—we are man to man now.

Vestani. How can one who is lowliest among the priests of the Church, presume upon equality with the mightiest?

His Holiness. It must be man to man, Joseph Vestani. There is no other way for me to find rest for the weary and laden one who has come to me. You wish to marry?

Vestani. I do, Holy Father.

His Holiness. In spite of your vows of abnegation, chastity and obedience?

Vestani. No, Holy Father. I could not be unchaste without absolution from those vows,—I will never disobey.

His Holiness. And if I deny this dispensation?

Vestani. There will be no defender of the Faith more loyal or courageous than I.

His Holiness. You are both, already, my son. The Church can ill afford to lose you.

Vestani. The Church would lose no jot of my loyalty, Holy Father, and in the new life I seek, I could do more a hundred times, to strengthen your

spiritual and temporal power and gather infidels under the banners of the Faith. Priests? I could educate them and send them out into the world. Churches? I could build them; Soldiers of the Cross? I could enlist them and lead them to victory. But, Holy Father, I cannot conjure away from my soul that haunting voice, which is ever near me to warn me that I am only human.

His Holiness. Ah, Joseph, why not do all this as you are?

Vestani. Would you have me hold to my vows through fear? Would you have me a priest of God, to preach chastity and obedience, when my nature counsels me always to disobey? The world has become to me a shining lure from which I cannot turn and be true. It beckons me night and day, to come to it, to be in it, and with it, and of it. Would you have me a living lie?

His Holiness. You have said that without this dispensation —

Vestani. I would still remain an officer in the army of the Cross. But I have not said that during the minutes, the hours, the weeks and the years that stretch out before me, I would not be thwarted in my work by the wraith of a memory that would be with me always.

His Holiness. What memory, my unhappy one!

Vestani. The memory of a love imprisoned but

not dead. A love whose ghost would never fade away though I lived through centuries.

His Holiness. A love greater than that for the Church?

Vestani. I have no such love, Holy Father. But why hold me to the greater one, with the smaller gnawing away, fibre by fibre, into the roots of it?

His Holiness. You have not sinned against God with this woman, by thought or deed?

Vestani. As I revere and love that God, no! My lips have never touched hers; my hand has never betrayed the thrills in the veins behind it;—but my eyes,—alas!—they pierced the thin veneer of righteousness and disclosed my secret.

His Holiness. To her?

Vestani. Yes, Holy Father.

His Holiness. And upon that she spake to you?

Vestani. Oh, no, Holy Father! Never one word from her. Her eyes and mine spake mutely together in the silence of prayer, as she lay on a bed of sickness from which she was never expected to rise.

His Holiness. Does she know of this mission to Rome?

Vestani. The mission, yes, but not the purpose of it. She would never have listened to one word of what was nearest and dearest to both of us, without a dispensation from you.

His Holiness. And if I refuse it?

Vestani. I know that she would consecrate the rest of her life to the Church.

His Holiness. I have said that the Church could ill afford to lose *you*. If I grant your plea, it would lose her too, would it not?

Vestani. Have I not said —

His Holiness. It would rob the Church of two valuable lives, consecrated to her alone.

Vestani. Yes, Holy Father, it would do that.

His Holiness. She is too jealous a mother to sacrifice her children to selfishness, and where I pity most I must be merciless.

Vestani. You have decided?

His Holiness. I have decided.

Vestani. And that decision?

His Holiness. Must be, that for the best interests of our Faith, and that its Canons may always remain inviolate, to refuse —

Vestani. Don't say the rest, Holy Father! Not yet, in the name of that Heaven whose keys you hold!

His Holiness. I have heard enough, my son.

Vestani. Not until I have finished, oh, Holy Father. You consented to that,—it was your own suggestion.

His Holiness. But I gave no consent to disobedience, rebellion.

Vestani. "We are not Prelate and Priest," you said. It was to be man to man, and as one

man pleading to another whose power is boundless, I beg of you to allow me one last question.

His Holiness [after a moment of thought]. The last you say?

Vestani. The last, Holy Father, and upon its answer let all depend.

His Holiness. You may ask it.

Vestani. As man to man still?

His Holiness. As man to man to the last,—I have promised it.

Vestani [coming from his chair to the throne so closely, that at times, in his great earnestness, his hand touches the arm of it, and he leans almost over it]. Then as man to man tell me this. Has there not been a time, when with the impulses of youth surging in your heart, and your soul sighing for a voice to lure it from its loneliness, you met the glances of a pair of eyes that thrilled you? In that hour did not something speak to you in a sweet language you had never heard before and yet could understand? Did not your heart beat the faster to know that it was no longer alone, and did you not find the accents of that strange tongue more eloquent than any you ever learned, and respond to it with a fervour that was new to you? If she lived, tell me that when you parted her last words are not even now burning in your memory, and, if she died, will you deny that you never forgot the agony that came to you, when the cruel clods of earth shut her out from you forever? Ah,

Holy Father, can you tell me this? [*During the above, His Holiness has become more and more deeply impressed by the earnestness of the speaker, and at its close, Vestani looks up to see the Holy Father's head bowed upon his breast reflectively.*] Your answer, Holy Father — you promised it.

Holy Father. I did, and it is ready, for my conscience has cleared again, and doubt no longer clouds my duty. First,—since you have asked it,—let me confess to you that there was such a time, I knew such a face, heard such a voice, and responded with an eloquence that was new. But as she died and was buried, so, with the cruel clods of earth, was laid away a heart all dead to worldly things.

Vestani. But can you say that no shadow of her memory followed you through the desolate years from then until now?

His Holiness [smiling]. There were no desolate years. A month, perhaps, and then the Church, contentment, peace, power. The same blessed compensation awaits you now, my son.

Vestani. Where would my service to the Church profit without contentment? Where the potency of power without peace? Mercy, Holy Father, mercy, pity, justice! [*Stretching out his hands in an agony of supplication.*]

His Holiness [with some show of asperity]. I forbid you to question my sense of Justice, Vestani.

I cannot be just to the Canons of the Church and extend this kind of sympathy to you. [*Vestani makes another pleading gesture.*] Enough! God hath spoken in my soul at last and my decision is formed.

Vestani. One word more, Holy Father,—this one indeed the last!

His Holiness. No, my son, you have already said more than I should have permitted myself to hear. But, for a time, the Almighty awoke the man within me, and bade him, not the Pope, to listen.

Vestani. Let my soul and my conscience cry out again and again for justice and mercy! Not for myself, but the persecuted soldiers of the Cross whom I could protect. The armies of the Turks are even now preparing to spread their power into the West and the North, and unless Rome aids it, the Greek Church will fly from them, instead of going out to fight them.

His Holiness. That was your plea in the Council, my son. You could not prove it.

Vestani. Nevertheless, it is as certain as that the needs of the Church in Roumania, Servia, and Macedonia, demand this dispensation!

His Holiness. I'll hear no more, Vestani!

Vestani. As man to man you said!

His Holiness. It is Prelate and Priest now! The audience has ended! [*The Pope stands with uplifted hand, while Vestani kneels before the*

throne with bowed head.] Say to the Cardinals, Sitelli and Ravenna, that I am ready to announce my decision! [Vestani rises with an expression of resignation, backs away from the throne, turns at the altar to make obeisance, and then bows himself out through the curtains R. with hands crossed on his breast. After a moment's pause, Vestani re-enters with Sitelli and Ravenna. Vestani stands near his chair and the two Cardinals take positions down R. C.]

His Holiness. My Lords Cardinal, the suppliant and I have ended our conference. In it I have permitted more freedom of thought and utterance than any other of my tenure of office. Joseph Vestani has failed, as his friends in Council failed, to show just cause for this dispensation.

Ravenna [extending his arms]. Holy Father —
His Holiness. Well, my son?

Ravenna. Before decision is rendered, let your humblest servant urge one more moment's delay.

His Holiness. There has been too much already. My duty is clear and I will perform it.

Sitelli. But delay now is of vital importance, Holy Father, and it is for duty's sake,— duty to sore needs of the Church that suffer keenly, which compels one who has opposed this dispensation from the first, to urge it now.

His Holiness. And you say this, Sitelli? Then must your reason be vital indeed. [*To Ravenna.*] Speak fully and without reserve, Ravenna.

Ravenna. News has just reached the Vatican that the Duke of Plevna is dead!

Vestani [*startled, but with a face full of hope*]. Dead! [*Each of the four crosses himself reverently.*]

Ravenna. Killed in battle, leading the Soldiers of the Cross against the Moslem invaders. His estates are laid waste, his wealth confiscated, the Church's most powerful Eastern dynasty is penniless, leaderless!

Vestani. And do not forget that the influence of Rome in Roumania is waning, Your Holiness. [*There is an impressive pause of a few moments. The Pope's head is bent on his breast in deep thought, and the other three regard him anxiously as if awaiting a decision from him. Finally a sudden inspiration seems to seize him and he looks smilingly at Vestani, at the same time extending his hand.*]

His Holiness. Joseph Vestani?

Vestani. Yes, Holy Father.

His Holiness. Surely the Almighty has sent you to me in this hour of travail and tribulation. I do recall what I have said. The Mother Church cries out for succour for her shattered armies!

Vestani. On me?

His Holiness. On you, Joseph, my son. She needs soldiers now more than priests,—what have you to propose?

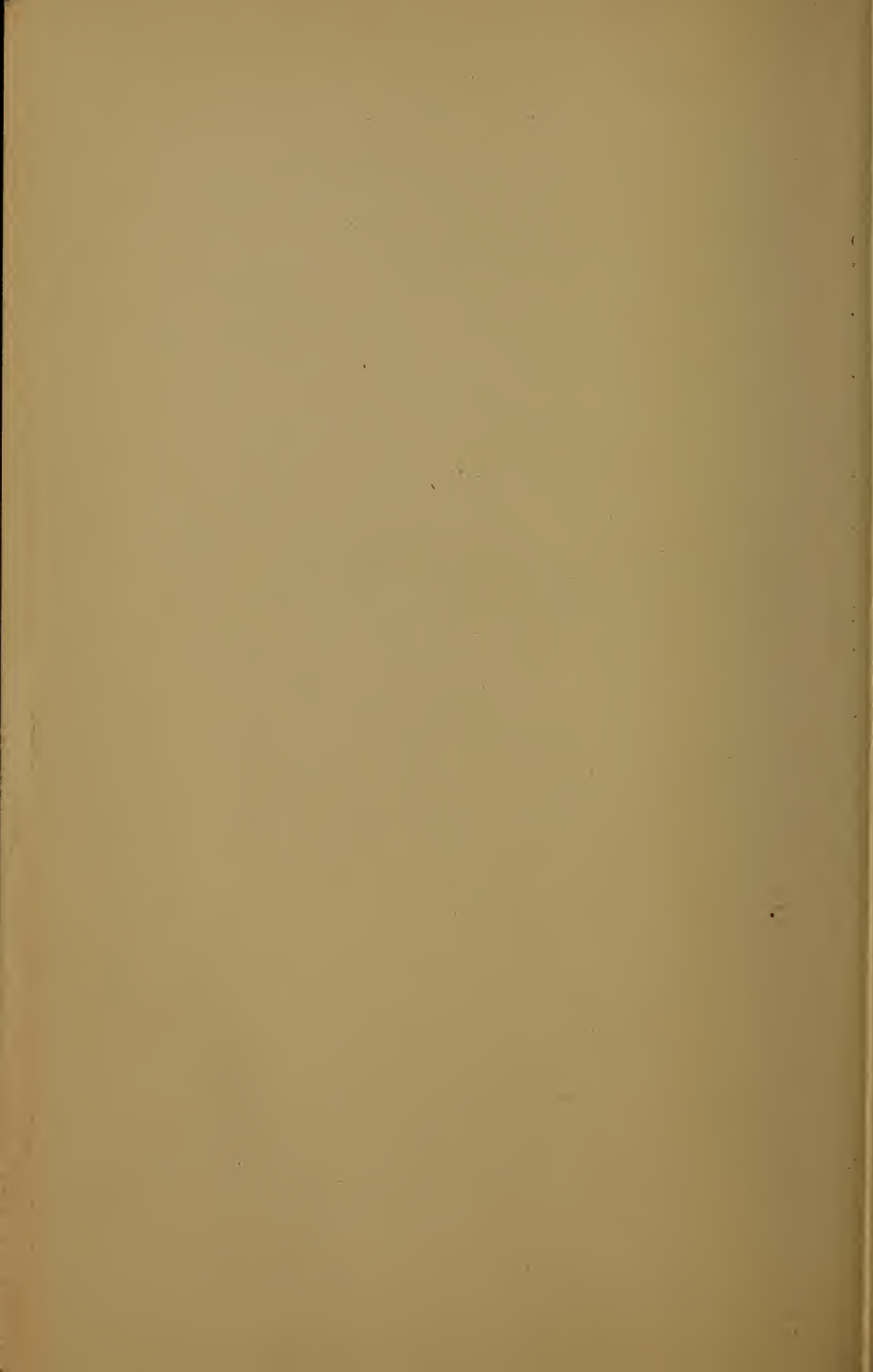
Vestani. This, Holy Father. Place in this

willing hand the sword of the Duke of Plevna. He was the only captain of Rome in the allied Balkan states, and I would take his place. His daughter, now Duchess of Plevna, is the woman I have sought to marry. The resources of my family are even greater than those once her father's. Unite her house with mine in holy marriage, and together we can regain what has been lost. Dispensation, Holy Father,—the Priest has failed, but the soldier can win! [*Vestani kneels at the feet of the Holy Father, who places his hand on his head and turns to Sitelli.*]

His Holiness. Ah, Sitelli, humanity's laws are not all evil and we should not always stand upon the letter and the spirit of the Canons of the Church. [*To Ravenna.*] Ravenna, command my Secretary to prepare and publish the necessary documents. The dispensation to Joseph Vestani is granted. [*Sitelli and Ravenna kneel, and His Holiness gives all of them the Papal blessing, standing.*]

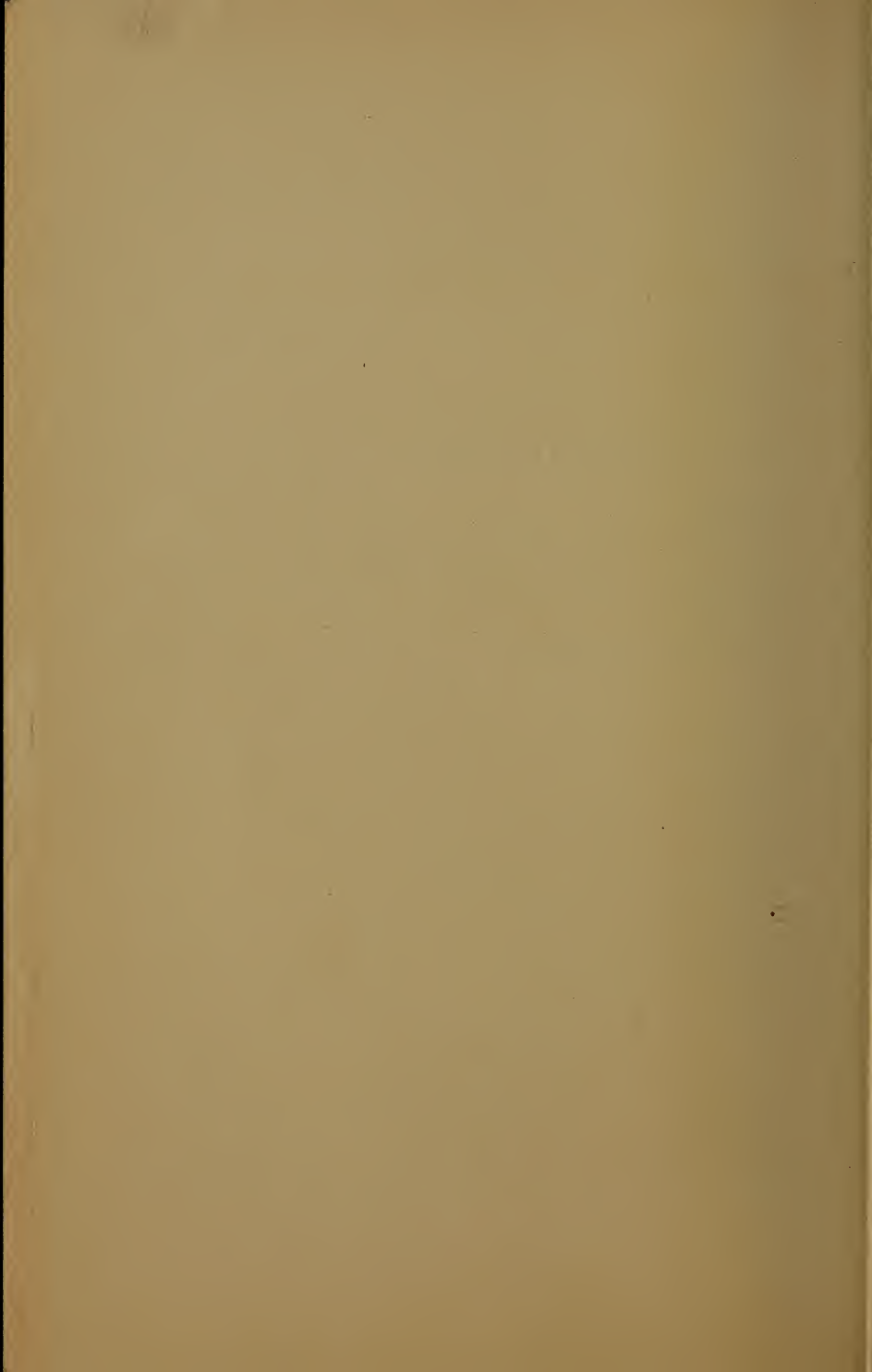
[CURTAIN.]

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM
A CHRISTMAS LESSON IN ONE CHAPTER



CHARACTERS

MEDFORD, }
CUTTING, } Fellow Club Members.
SPRIGHTLY, }
HUXTON,
THOMPSON, Club Waiter.



THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

SCENE.— *The cosy corner of a gentlemen's club.*

At rise of curtain Thompson is discovered arranging the fittings of sideboard. Enter Medford.

Medford. Good evening, Thompson.

Thompson. Good evening, Mr. Medford.

Medford. Merry Christmas to you.

Thompson. Thank you kindly, sir, the same to you, sir.

Medford. Get me a brandy and soda.

Thompson. Yes, sir. [*Gets one ready.*]

Medford. "Merry Christmas!" I hope there are not many tonight whose lives are so utterly barren of merriment as mine is. There's not a voice whose sound can break the awful monotony of my thoughts. If it were not for brandy I really believe I should lose my mind, tortured as it is with that wretched picture of hopeless desolation.

Thompson. Here's your order, sir.

Medford. Oh, Thompson, I had quite forgotten you.

Thompson. About what, sir?

Medford. I was bemoaning the fact of my loneliness.

Thompson. Yes, sir?

Medford. But I've got you, haven't I?

Thompson. Much obliged to you if I can be of any service to you, and welcome. [*Pours soda in Medford's glass.*] At the same time, sir,—

Medford. Well, go on.

Thompson. You are the richest gentleman in the club, sir, while poor me —

Medford. No one but a cad, Thompson, ever begrudges a pleasant word to the poor devil whom Fate has classed beneath him.

Thompson. That's the nicest Christmas box I've had today, sir, and I thank you, sir.

Medford. Then this could not have been a very merry Christmas, eh?

Thompson. Oh, I can't complain, sir, so long as I can keep the old woman and kids in out o' the wet.

Medford. Oh, you have a family, then?

Thompson. I have indeed, sir.

Medford. How many children?

Thompson. Only seven, sir.

Medford. Seven! Seven children! What are your wages here?

Thompson. Forty dollars, sir.

Medford. And you can keep this family from want?

Thompson. Indeed I can, sir, and God bless

'em. Countin' in, of course, what the old 'oman gets out of her sewin'. Our 'ome ain't a double decker flat, but it's not so bad in its way, and to-night not one of 'em's forgot, and we've a Christmas tree into the bargain. [*Handing check for him to sign.*] Check, sir?

Medford [*looking at check*]. Did you write this?

Thompson. Yes, sir, why?

Medford. Call at my office when your month is up here, won't you?

Thompson. What for, sir?

Medford. I think I may be able to place you a little nearer the double decker flat.

Thompson. Oh, Mr. Medford!

Medford. Don't thank me — not just yet. Thompson, a man who can support a family of nine on forty dollars a month and a little sewing, deserves advancement. In the meantime,— [*Raising his glass.*] May your little family never know a Christmas that is not a merry one, and may no cloud ever darken your hearthstone. [*Empties his glass and pours out more liquor.*]

Thompson. Thank you, sir. The same to you and many of 'em.

Medford. Another bottle of soda, please. [*Finishes his drink and sighs.*]

Thompson. Yes, sir. [*Goes to sideboard for more soda and looks at Medford.*] The next member that calls him "Moody Medford" will

have something cuttin' said to him if I looses my job. [*Enter Cutting.*]

Cutting. Nobody in the club?

Thompson. Only Mr. Medford, sir.

Cutting. And he gives me the willies. Bring me a highball of Scotch — plenty of ice. [*Goes to a table L. Thompson serves Medford with another bottle of soda, and Cutting speaks across the room to him.*] Have something, Mr. Medford?

Medford. No, thank you. Thompson is just serving me. [*Pours brandy and soda. Thompson goes up stage to fill Cutting's order.*]

Cutting [*to himself, looking over at Medford*]. What can be the mystery of that fellow's life? He controls millions and yet no one has ever seen a smile on his face. [*Thompson serves him. A call bell rings outside, and Thompson hurries out.*] Here we go. [*Raises his glass toward Medford.*] Here we go, Mr. Medford.

Medford [*raising his glass*]. Permit me to wish you a —

Cutting. Not a Merry Christmas. Merry hell would be nearer the truth.

Medford. Either condition is entirely under your own control, Mr. Cutting.

Cutting. It is, eh? Have you been down on the Street?

Medford. The slump cost me nearly two hundred thousand.

Cutting. Well, it hasn't made you any merrier, has it? If it has you manage to conceal the fact most ingeniously.

Medford. Stock gambling is only a diversion, and whether I win or lose the impression on my temperament is precisely the same.

Cutting. A peculiar temperament, too, if you'll pardon my saying so.

Medford. Yes, I know that. It is a misfortune — a disease — a curse, if you will, but I cannot control it.

Cutting. Why then did you assure me that my moods are under my control?

Medford. You have a home and a wife. Your two daughters are among the most favoured belles of society.

Cutting. What have they to do with it?

Medford. The answer is only too obvious I think.

Cutting. Why then did you break your engagement with my daughter, if a wife and family are so essential to one's happiness?

Medford. Because there would have been no family.

Cutting. How could you know that?

Medford. We ——discussed it!

Cutting. And you broke with her for that?

Medford. For only that.

Cutting. Great God! If your marriage must

depend upon childbirth your chase after a wife is going to be a long one now-a-days.

Medford. Then I shall never marry again.

Cutting. My dear fellow, what time has a beautiful and brilliant woman with a position in society to maintain, for the care of a lot of brats?

Medford. No woman, Mr. Cutting, however beautiful or brilliant — who would place the barrier of social distinction between her womanhood and her “brats” as you call them — could ever retain my respect, and without that I would not marry an Empress. [*Enter Thompson.*]

Cutting. Give me some more ice, Thompson.

Thompson. Yes, sir. [*Goes to sideboard and gets ice, and fills Cutting's glass.*]

Cutting. 'Pon my soul, Medford, it seems utterly impossible for you and me to have ten minutes' conversation together without a wrangle. Best have nothing to say to each other at all.

Medford. With all my heart. More soda, Thompson.

Thompson. With pleasure and 'appiness, if I may say so, Mr. Medford. [*Serves him with ice.*]

Cutting. There's no one so hopeless as the man with theories.

Medford. Except him who has none at all. [*Enter Huxton, a brisk, healthy man of sixty-five. He carries a lot of packages.*]

Huxton. Here, Thompson, take my dunnage, will you?

Thompson. Yes, sir. [*Relieves him of bundles.*]

Huxton. Gee whizzle! This is playing Santa Claus with a vengeance. My coppers are all warped from the alternating currents of the icy streets and the torrid toy stores. Somebody give me a drink for God's sake.

Medford. Take Mr. Huxton's order, Thompson.

Huxton. No, no, what you've got there is good enough for me. Just a bottle of soda, Thompson. [*Thompson brings soda.*]

Cutting. What were you doing in toy stores?

Huxton. Now, you didn't suppose I was buying mowing machines, did you?

Cutting. I thought you were Field Marshall of the Alimony army.

Huxton. I am, but that shouldn't affect the children.

Medford. That's true,—they were not to blame.

Cutting. They side with their mother apparently.

Huxton. Why shouldn't they? The young rascals, if they didn't I'd disinherit the whole blooming quintette.

Cutting. That's what I'd do if my children were to decide against me. I'll give odds that it was the fault of the woman. It always is,—come to sift the family secrets.

Huxton. You must excuse me, Cutting, if I decline to discuss the secrets of my late lamented hearthstone in my club. Legally the fault was mine, so why reach further? Served me good and right anyway.

Cutting. Why?

Huxton. Why for letting myself get caught. [*Raises glass.*] Well! A Merry Christmas to my blasted fireside, my broken wedding ring, and the five boys!

Medford. Huxton, how can you jest over so serious a subject?

Huxton. Why, bless your dear old brooding heart, Medford, it's not serious. You should have seen them all tonight. Happy as Dutchmen on a spree, and it added ten years to my rascally old life to see them so.

Medford. But to be separated from your wife and children!

Huxton. That's where you're wrong. I'm not separated at all. There's a decree and all that, but we're the best of friends. We have no quarrels, no spats, no nagging. I can do as I please, and whenever one of the boys gets into mischief she consults me over the telephone. Then when Christmas comes I load up with presents, pull the latchstring of my once matrimonial roof tree, and — we have a whooping time.

Medford. You are on your way there now?

Huxton. No. Second trip. My first selec-

tions did not seem to be just what were wanted, so I went for a second load that would be more academic and less noisy. A dear little woman who loves her lord was proving it in the flat above, and we had to be quiet. Young Sprightly — member of the club here — his first baby is arriving tonight.

Medford. Some champagne, Thompson!

Thompson. With the greatest pleasure, sir.
[*Thompson hurries off.*]

Medford. I want to drink long life to the new baby, eternal happiness to its mother, and prosperity to the manly young fellow whom fortune has kissed tonight.

Cutting. Whom Fortune has kissed?

Huxton. Why, of course. Didn't it?

Cutting. Why, he hasn't three thousand a year. [*Re-enter Thompson with champagne and glasses.*]

Medford. Thompson here hasn't five hundred and he has — how many children, Thompson?

Thompson [*serving the wine*]. Only seven, sir, bless their 'earts.

Cutting. And all of them on the verge of starvation.

Thompson [*stiffly*]. I'm sorry you're a member, sir, and me a servant. [*Enter Sprightly exultantly.*]

Sprightly. A Merry Christmas to all of you, gentlemen, and if it's as merry as mine you are the

happiest men in the world. You don't know how glad I am to find you here. I was afraid the club would be deserted with not a single friend to tell it to.

Huxton. Well, why don't you tell it then?

Sprightly. Some champagne, Thompson. That's all I can say till I've had a drink.

Huxton. The champagne's already ordered, and for the same commendable object. Come, what is it — boy or girl?

Sprightly. Both!

Huxton. Gee flip! Not twins?

Sprightly. It does seem too good to be true, but I tell you I've had them in my arms. Two little mites like pink pearls and not much bigger than bottles of wine.

Medford. My boy, I congratulate you.

Sprightly. I thought you would be glad to hear, for you were the only one of our friends who was good enough to predict that our marriage could be a happy one.

Huxton. No, he wasn't, I predicted it. Every marriage is happy for a time. Even mine was the very perfection of bliss until — well, never mind. But I want to drink my congratulations and this wine is getting flat. [*Raising his glass.*] The babies.

Sprightly and Medford. The babies. [*These three drink — Cutting remaining silent.*]

Sprightly. But how horrible it was! I never

knew what the name of Mother meant until to-night, when that brave little girl was opening my eyes for the first time. And when it was all over she drew me to her and said: "Don't cry, dear,—it wasn't so bad after all."

Medford. God bless her!

Sprightly. After I had been out of the room for a time that seemed an age, and they let me see those little atoms of humanity that were all mine — (and hers) — I bent over them, and with their Father's first kiss was registered a vow to be loyal to their Mother as long as we both shall live.

Huxton. We all say that once, my boy, and mean it at the time.

Medford [*with much feeling*]. Shame on you! Will you presume to say that no man is strong enough to be true to her who out of love for him will endure the exquisite pangs of maternity, or brave enough to be proof against the taunting imputation of being tied to one woman's apron strings?

Sprightly. Thank you, Mr. Medford.

Huxton. But there are times, old man —

Medford. Given the wife who *is* a wife — mind you in everything that the term implies — there *is* no time when there is an excuse for infidelity, and the man who defends it upon any grounds is a brute who has no right to be blessed with a good wife. [*Takes Sprightly's hand.*] He'll keep his vow, Huxton.

Sprightly. You bet he will.

Huxton. Well, we'll drink to it and hope for the best.

Thompson [*who has been listening with interest*]. Champagne, Mr. Sprightly?

Sprightly. Thank you, Thompson.

Thompson [*pouring out wine*]. And if I might make so bold as to say —

Sprightly. You may say any old thing to me tonight, Thompson.

Thompson. Well, sir, my first baby was twins, and it was good luck to me for I've never 'ad an idle day — ever since. The same to you, sir.

Sprightly. I appreciate the sentiment, Thompson, and I thank you. [*To Cutting, who has all along preserved an almost listless demeanour*]. Mr. Cutting, you haven't said a word since I came in, and your glass is empty.

Cutting. I've been listening though, and have heard no theory which I should not have felt compelled to oppose. You won't feel hurt if I am entirely frank, not to say brusque?

Sprightly. Oh dear, no. Go on, do.

Cutting. Your hysterical outburst I consider altogether indelicate. Medford's pathetic lectures on the marriage tie, and paternity, I am used to; but even if I were not, I should not consider them worthy of debating.

Medford. That is because you never knew; never learned; never tried to learn.

Cutting. Ah? And you feel amply qualified to teach me, no doubt?

Medford. Altogether so I am sure.

Cutting. Then if Thompson will give me another drink I will endeavour to profit by your superior knowledge. Go on.

Medford. May I be as frank as you were?

Cutting. Naturally. That's only fair.

Medford [*going to him*]. Did your wife ever love you?

Cutting. I am not sure now that the question of love ever entered into the arrangement.

Medford. It *was* an arrangement then — that only?

Cutting. That's all, and an advantageous one it was for all of us. [*Medford goes up stage in thought.*]

Huxton [*to Sprightly*]. How like Cutting that is.

Sprightly. The dollar mark on one side of his life — the minus sign on the other.

Medford [*coming down*]. How could a woman whose marriage was a simple business arrangement, bring up her children in a way to lay before a father the ennobling glories of paternity?

Cutting. She never tried. She was always too busy with social functions; I with business.

Medford. Then I was right. You never knew, never learned, never tried to learn. The minds of your children, formed by hired servants, learned

to look upon their mother as the provider of social excitements, and their father as the convenient agent who should pay for them. You sneer at this boy for his delicious exaltation, Huxton for his liberality, and me for what you call my lectures. And yet your own experiences have never qualified you to be either a competent critic, or a just judge. 'Am I too severe?

Cutting [a little moved]. No, no,— go on.

Medford. Your veins have never thrilled with the joy that comes to him who has wooed and won; you never felt the flush of pride that comes with the dawn of fatherhood. The scene which that young father described to us in the full glory of youthful enthusiasm has been a closed book to you. You never watched your little ones grow up about you, to entwine their natures with yours, and to mould their tastes, their fancies, their characters, out of the thrills of a Father's soul. You never saw the noblest of wives and mothers sacrifice her life in bringing one of those little ones into the world; you never weaved every fibre of your being about the lives of your motherless children, only to see them sicken and die, one by one, cloaking every corner of your home with the mantle of desolation, and your heart with a grinding solitude that must be eternal. None of these have you ever known, and I have passed through them all, step by step, pang by pang. This is the mystery of my life which you have so often asked

about ; this is the reason why I can enter into none of the pleasures that make the lives of other men endurable. And yet I would not exchange places with you today, for believe me “it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.” [*Sprightly and Huxton brush tears from their eyes — a slight pause.*]

Cutting. Medford, I have wronged you deeply and I ask your pardon. Yours too, Sprightly. But perhaps it was not my fault after all that I never knew.

Huxton. Come, come, come! This is not the sort of amusement for Christmas Eve. Lectures and — reminiscences, and — damn it, we’ve all been crying.

Sprightly. It’s not a very Merry Christmas, is it?

Cutting. I never had a Merry Christmas. I have grown to hate the very word. There has never seemed anything in it to me but cupidity, haggling and expense.

Huxton [to Sprightly]. That dollar mark again.

Sprightly. Tell him what it means, Mr. Medford.

Medford. No, I’ve said enough. Your mind is better equipped than mine tonight, to speak of the story and the meaning of Christmas.

Huxton. Make it short, my boy, and — and pleasant.

Sprightly. Nineteen hundred and twelve years ago tonight a brilliant star appeared in the Far East, and stood above a stable in Bethlehem. It signalised to all the world the birth of a being that was to bring peace on earth — good will to men. The wise men of the East brought gifts of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, and laid them beside the babe, who was to be the founder of Christianity. From that day to this Christmas has been a day of peace, and good will, and the laying of gifts at the feet of those we love. A star appeared to me tonight, rested above the little Bethlehem that is my home, placed me at peace with all the world, and pointed out to me that there is no man for whom I do not feel good will.

Cutting. You were right, Medford. I never knew, never tried to learn.

Sprightly [*looking at watch*]. Gracious! I've been away an hour, and didn't expect to be gone half so long. But Mary insisted upon letting my friends know.

Huxton. We live in the same house,—I'll go with you. Help me with that truck, Thompson. [*Thompson gives him his bundles.*]

Sprightly. Good night, Mr. Medford.

Medford. I have a request to make of you before we part. It has for some years been my custom to share what I have too much of with those who have not enough, and I have not made my selection for this year. My business has ceased

to divert me any longer. Will you take charge of it for me?

Thompson [*at Cutting's shoulder*]. Didn't I say them twins 'ud bring good luck, sir?

Sprightly. Mr. Medford, it seems too good to be true.

Medford. Do you accept?

Sprightly. Accept! Mr. Medford, if I say it myself, you will never regret it. But if they will let us in, won't you come home with me and tell Mary?

Medford. Some other time, perhaps — not to-night.

Sprightly. Well anyway let me show you the babies.

Huxton. Yes, show us your babies, and on the way upstairs I'll show you mine.

Sprightly [*to Medford*]. Will you come?

Medford. I will. [*Taking his hand and looking into his eyes.*] Who knows but that in these little ones of yours I may find some compensation for the two I lost?

Sprightly. We'll have to consult Mary about that.

Huxton. And if Mary objects I'll have the late Mrs. Huxton compensate you with a few of ours.

Sprightly [*to Cutting*]. Will you come, Mr. Cutting?

Cutting. Thank you, no. I have a business engagement.

Sprightly. Good night, then. Merry Christmas to you.

Cutting. Thank you. [*Sprightly and Medford hurry off.*]

Huxton. [*to Cutting*]. Can't you rub out the dollar marks for once, old man?

Cutting. No, I'm afraid they're stamped on my nature, indelibly as tattoo.

Huxton. Oh, well, it's up to you, old man. Merry Christmas all the same. [*Huxton goes out, and Thompson, clearing away the table the others have just left, looks over at Cutting.*]

Thompson. He could have a Merry Christmas too, if he only knewed how.

Cutting [*meditatively, his head leaning on his hand*]. There is no Star of Bethlehem for me, no Peace on Earth, no Good Will for any Man. Is there, Thompson?

Thompson. If you'll excuse me, sir, I think all them things is in one's own 'ands.

Cutting. You think so, eh?

Thompson. Yes, I do, sir.

Cutting. Well, to be frank with you, what I've just been listening to has made me begin to think so myself. Get me my hat and coat.

Thompson. Yes, sir. [*Thompson hurries out into the hallway. Cutting takes a checkbook from his pocket and, with a fountain pen writes a*

check. When he has finished he rises, with the check in his hand, and Thompson re-enters with Cutting's hat and coat.]

Cutting. Thank you, Thompson. [*Thompson helps him with his hat and coat, when he hands him the check.*] And now, I want you to accept this with my best compliments of the season.

Thompson [*taking the check and starting with surprise.*] One thousand dollars! For me, sir?

Cutting. Yes, it's for you. I thought that a man with a large family who could be happy on forty dollars a month, was deserving of my first expression of regard for the wonderful lessons that came with the Star of Bethlehem. [*He hurries out of the door, and Thompson drops into a chair and is looking mutely at the check at —*

[CURTAIN.]

**“THROUGH CHRISTMAS
BELLS”**

CHARACTERS

THE REVEREND MR. MAYLEIGH.

LUKE MAYLEIGH, His Son.

MRS. MAYLEIGH.

THE SEXTON.

A PARISHIONER.

“THROUGH CHRISTMAS BELLS”

SCENE.—*The Sacristy, or disrobing room of a fashionable Church. Doors R. & L. If possible, a wide ecclesiastical window C., at back, through which bright moonlight shines through the stained glass. A table and 2 chairs C. Before the rise of the curtain a Te Deum is sung, accompanied by the organ. At Rise of Curtain a loud peal from a chime of bells.*

DISCOVERED.—*Strang (the old Sexton), standing C., and several gentlemen in overcoats, and holding their hats in their hands, standing R.*

Strang. Mr. Mayleigh will be here very shortly, gentlemen. The Organist detained him. Something, I dare say, about the praise service in the morning, which is to be very impressive, indeed. [*Another peal of the chimes, and all stand listening.*] How beautiful they are! I seem to feel in every stroke the sweet meaning they are intended to convey to all to-night: “Peace on

Earth! Good will to men!" [Mr. Mayleigh enters L. I. E. in surplice and stole.]

Mayleigh. Ah, Gentlemen, it was good of you to come. A right Merry Christmas to all of you. [Shakes hands with them in turn.]

A Parishioner. Are you quite well to-night, Mr. Mayleigh?

Mayleigh. Thank you, very well, indeed. [Looks at him.] There is an expression of concern on your face — not regarding me?

Parishioner. Yes. I thought that during your address —

Mayleigh. I remember. It occurred just before I had finished. I stopped, didn't I? But believe me, that was only mental — not physical. I thought I saw a face in the congregation which I believed had long ago passed out of my life, and it gave me — a sudden shock. That was all, believe me. Won't you sit down?

Parishioner. No, thank you, our people are waiting for us.

Mayleigh. Good night, then. [Shaking hands with each.] Peace and rest to all of you to-night, and a right Merry Christmas to-morrow.

All the Men. A Merry Christmas! Good night!

Mayleigh. Good night again. A Merry Christmas to the wives and little ones. [The men bow and go out R. Mayleigh offers both hands to Strang.] And now, a Merry Christmas to you.

Strang. Thank you, Mr. Mayleigh.

Mayleigh [*shaking his hand warmly*]. My faithful Sexton for — dear me — how long has it been?

Strang. Twenty-five years, now, sir. [*Begins to assist Mayleigh in removing vestments.*]

Mayleigh. Is it so long? We're getting old, my friend, and we've grown old together, haven't we?

Strang [*taking vestments and hanging them in a closet L.*]. Yes, sir, but they've been very happy years — every one of them.

Mayleigh. For you, yes. But you must remember many of mine that were very wretched indeed.

Strang. Yes, I remember, sir. But long ago you asked me never to refer to them.

Mayleigh. I must refer to them to-night, old friend. [*Sits.*] *Strang*, if you were to see *her*, you would know her, wouldn't you?

Strang. Your wife, sir?

Mayleigh [*sitting at table sadly*]. She that *was* my wife — yes. It would not be possible — would it — for you to fail to recognize her?

Strang. I'm sure it wouldn't, sir. Mrs. Mayleigh couldn't change so that *I* wouldn't know her.

Mayleigh. Are you sure that she was not in the Church to-night?

Strang. [*surprised*]. Mrs. Mayleigh!

Mayleigh. Yes.

Strang. Quite sure, sir. I was at the door all the time, and if she had passed me, I *must* have recognised her. Was it that which made you pause in your sermon?

Mayleigh. Only that. Get me my hat and coat, please. I wonder whether I am glad or sorry that I was mistaken. [*Rises. Strang gets hat and coat from closet L.*] Will you walk to the Rectory with me?

Strang. I will indeed, sir, and thank you. [*Holds up overcoat. Mayleigh is about to thrust his arm into one of the sleeves when a knock is heard at R. D.*]

Mayleigh. There is some one at the door. See who it is. [*Strang places the overcoat L., and goes to R. D., opening it. Luke Mayleigh appears and stands just inside the door.*]

Strang. A gentleman, sir.

Luke. Mr. Mayleigh?

Mayleigh. Yes.

Luke [*eyeing him with interest*]. May I see you for a few moments? It is something most important.

Mayleigh. A Church matter?

Luke. If the mission of the Church be Mercy and Charity — yes.

Mayleigh. Surely you do not doubt it?

Luke. It is my misfortune perhaps, that I have always done that. I am here to-night to have my

doubt strengthened, or removed altogether!

[*With a look at Strang.*] But —

Mayleigh [*to Strang*]. You may go now, Mr. Strang.

Strang. Very well, sir. Good night.

Mayleigh [*going to Strang. Luke crosses to L.*]. I beg your pardon. [*Taking Strang's hand.*] Good night, old friend, and a Merry Christmas to you and yours.

Strang. Thank you, sir, the same to you always. [*Mayleigh coming down to R. of table. Aside.*] I never saw such a resemblance between two people before. [*Exit.*]

Mayleigh. Now, sir, I am at your service. Will you be seated?

Luke. Thank you, no. I have been sitting all the evening. I attended the watch service.

Mayleigh. Then you will pardon me if I sit down. I am older than you, and have held service four times since morning.

Luke. You are evidently most sincere in your calling, Mr. Mayleigh.

Mayleigh. If I had not been so, I could not have held my pastorate for more than twenty years. Only a sincere man could have done that.

Luke. True. But has the sincerity which has made you the most popular clergyman in your Diocese, taught you how to be just?

Mayleigh [*with a moment's enquiring look*].

That is an odd question, coming from a stranger — and one so young, too! Have we ever met before?

Luke. Never. And yet we can scarcely be called strangers.

Mayleigh. I do not understand you at all. A moment ago you spoke of some doubt or other which you wished me to remove. What was it?

Luke. I confessed that it was my misfortune to doubt the charity and mercy of your religion, and — [*Hesitating.*]

Mayleigh. Pray, go on. I always insist upon absolute frankness and candour in the statements of those who doubt the truth.

Luke. You shall have both, Mr. Mayleigh. Have you always been charitable toward those who have erred?

Mayleigh. I hope so.

Luke. Have you been merciful to those who have sinned?

Mayleigh. It has always been my endeavour to be charitable — merciful and just. [*Rises.*] You may doubt my religion, but you have no cause to doubt me.

Luke. Have I not? One question more.

Mayleigh. Not to-night. If you were a way-farer searching after the truth, I would gladly listen to you. But since your intrusion here was obviously for the purpose of provoking a personal discussion, I must ask you to withdraw.

Luke. Not until I have carried out the purpose of that intrusion.

Mayleigh. Then I will go myself! [*He is about to go toward R. D. when Luke stands between him and the door.*]

Luke. When I have finished,—not before.

Mayleigh. Who are you that presumes to come to me at this time of the night, and on consecrated ground, to insult and threaten me? What is the purpose of it all — who sent you to do this?

Luke. I came as the representative of Mrs. Mayleigh.

Mayleigh [*staggered*]. My wife!

Luke. Yes, the woman to whom you refused the charity of thought and deed in her hour of trial; to whom you denied mercy in her prayers of tribulation; to whom you were unjust in the cruel penance you imposed.

Mayleigh. Oh, why must that awful past come back to me again, with its heart throbs, its sorrows, and its tears? Why couldn't it down? I hoped I had crushed it out of my life forever! [*Sits at table and buries his face in his hands.*]

Luke. That was not what you preached to-night.

Mayleigh. You were there, you said. You heard — and — and she?

Luke. Sat by my side, with her hand quivering in mine, and the hot tears streaming from her careworn face, as you uttered the words: “Come

unto me all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"

Mayleigh. Oh, don't! don't!

Luke. Back in the long ago she came to you laden with sorrow and repentance, and prayed for the rest and peace of forgiveness. You turned her out into the world alone!

Mayleigh. No, not alone!

Luke. I say alone!

Mayleigh. I sent her back to the man who had stolen her from me.

Luke. There was no such man.

Mayleigh. I had it in her own words, penned by her own hand. These words: "It was all a mistake, John. We were never meant for each other, and I have brought you nothing but sorrow. I have gone never to return, with the man whom I was intended for from the first."

Luke. And after that?

Mayleigh. Why must I be tortured like this? Have you no mercy at all?

Luke. You had none for her. After that — what?

Mayleigh. In two days she returned, told me that her sin had been only one of intention; which in her first hour of absence she had repented of. She knelt at my feet, and sued for pardon.

Luke. And you — what did you say?

Mayleigh. "Who looketh on a man to lust after him, committeth adultery with him already

in her heart.” I could not forget that. I could not forgive her.

Luke. But you forgot that even the convicted adulteress was forgiven by Him on whose words you have founded your religion. “And He said unto her, ‘Woman, where are those, thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?’ She said, ‘No man, Lord!’ He said unto her: ‘Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more.’”

Mayleigh [rising]. But you do not know — cannot know all of it. In all the years of my ministry, no man has ever dared to utter to me the words that I have permitted from you. But the earnestness of your manner, and an undefinable something in your face drew me toward you, and I listened patiently. I ask you now to listen patiently to me — to my defence. Will you do this?

Luke. Yes. [*Sits at L., of table.*]

Mayleigh [walks up stage, turns, pauses a moment, then walks down to R. of table]. She came into the world while I was yet a child and when I stood by her cradle, our parents betrothed us to each other. In a spirit of jest, perhaps; but as we grew older we took it seriously, and from childhood to youth, from youth to maturity, we learned to regard that betrothal of two babies as a bond between a man and woman which must never be broken. We failed to see, as our two natures ripened, that her thoughts and mine were ever wide apart, that her tastes and mine were in con-

stant discord. For a time I had a rival in my attachment. A younger, handsomer, wealthier man than I was a suitor for her hand. But she chose me, and we were married. Then we knew that the realisation of our childhood's dream was a curse instead of a blessing, for there was no ambition of mine she cared to encourage, no whim of hers which my views of life could lead me to gratify. If a little one had come to us, the sweet bond of child-love might have drawn us closer together; but this one lingering hope was denied us, and the breach between us widened more and more every day. All this time the rival of our betrothal days was constantly at our table and our fireside, and my wife's regard for him (which she never attempted to conceal) was ever a worm of jealousy eating away my love and my faith. But I never dreamed of guilt in this attachment, until I received the letter of which you have heard; which was at least an implied confession of sin, and which you seem to think I must have forgiven, or else be false to the religious precepts it had been my mission to teach.

Luke. But —

Mayleigh. Not yet. [*Extending hand.*] A few words more, and I will have finished. As she knelt at my feet, pleading for forgiveness, the chastening words of the New Testament were ever before me, but I blotted them out — my heart was stone. I tried to forgive, but could not, and ever

since then I have as hopelessly tried to forget. If I have erred, show me how to correct my error; — if I have sinned, teach me how to atone for it.

Luke. You ask this of *me*?

Mayleigh. I demand it of you, after what has passed between us. It has been said: “A little child shall lead them!” You are scarcely more than a child, but your earnestness and candour have impressed me deeply, and I ask you to lead *me*.

Luke [*aside*]. Ah, Mother, dear, you didn’t know him after all. The story you have told, Mr. Mayleigh, is true, but one chapter of it you never knew. Shall I tell it to you?

Mayleigh. Yes. And leave nothing unsaid, however keen the sting.

Luke. Your married life was hopeless from the first. You should have known that a beautiful woman, reared to the frivolities of society, could not fail to find the narrowness of the Rectory other than a prison.

Mayleigh. You are right — go on —

Luke. The story you have told is true — all of it — but the letter which she wrote you did not reflect all of the truth that was struggling in her wretched soul. She had no sooner left the city than she repented of her act, for she had discovered what she did not know before, — that the one bond to bring your two wandering hearts together had been promised at last.

Mayleigh. What bond?

Luke. She had learned that she was likely to become a mother.

Mayleigh. God in Heaven! She did not tell me this!

Luke. She knelt at your feet with the words trembling on her lips, but you would not let them out. She endeavoured to explain, but you refused to listen. You opened the door of the home that had been hers as well as yours, turned her into the street, and warned her never to look you in the face again, on pain of exposure of the step taken in a moment of anger.

Mayleigh. My punishment was greater than even I deserved, but it was just—it was just! And the child? The hope of my youth, the regret of my old age—it came?

Luke. It came and lived, and thank God! learned how to keep that Mother's life tearless, and free from want!

Mayleigh. She kept my child from me—I could have forgiven all but that: The child was mine—mine—and she had no right to rob me of it!

Luke. The child was hers, for you had cast the mother out!

Mayleigh. Mine, I say! The child was mine according to the law!

Luke. The child was hers according to the Divine law of Maternity! And it was to evade

the stern laws of man that she ran away to England, where her son came to solace her in her pitiless solitude.

Mayleigh. A son, you say? My son, and I never knew. Oh God, oh God, how I could have loved him! How he could have weaved our two wandering souls together! How happy we might have been all these years!

Luke. She sent me to you to-night with this message: “Ask him to let me hope that it may not yet be too late.”

Mayleigh. You? Why should she have sent you?

Luke. Who could have delivered such a message so well as her own son?

Mayleigh [*starting*]. Ah! [*Looking at him in tender excitement.*] My boy! Mine! Mine and hers! [*Holding out his arms*]. Why don't you come to me? Can't you see that my old heart hungers for you?

Luke. Father! [*Business.*]

Mayleigh. My son! [*They embrace. They keep the position for a moment, Mr. Mayleigh sobbing on Luke's breast convulsively — then looking into his face, both hands clasped in his.*] Ah, my brave, generous, noble boy! No son ever made so gallant a fight for his Mother's honour. But tell me more. How it came about. Leave nothing unsaid. You came to the Church to-night?

Luke. Yes. We read a notice of your Christmas Eve service on our arrival from Europe this morning, and she expressed a desire to see how you looked after all these weary, pardonless years. You preached so eloquently and earnestly, "Peace on Earth, Good Will to all Men," that she hoped that perhaps there might be left in your heart just a little good will for her, and on Earth some of the peace she had deserved and yet lost. [*Mayleigh presses his hands tenderly.*] "Go to him, Luke," she said—"after all there is nothing to forgive, and only a little to forget."

Mayleigh. There is nothing in my heart but love for her; and on Earth there shall never again be anything but peace.

Luke. Then it is forgiveness?

Mayleigh. My son, it is I who need forgiveness, both from her and from Heaven. [*Mayleigh kneels reverently at the table and bows his head in prayer. The Christmas Chimes begin again to peal out merrily. Luke goes up to R. D., and leads in Mrs. Mayleigh, an interesting and elegantly dressed old lady—Luke leads her down stage to where Mayleigh is kneeling. She gazes at him tenderly for a moment and then speaks.*] Father! [*Mayleigh rises, sees Mrs. Mayleigh, and they embrace rapturously—Luke looking on pleased.*]

CURTAIN.

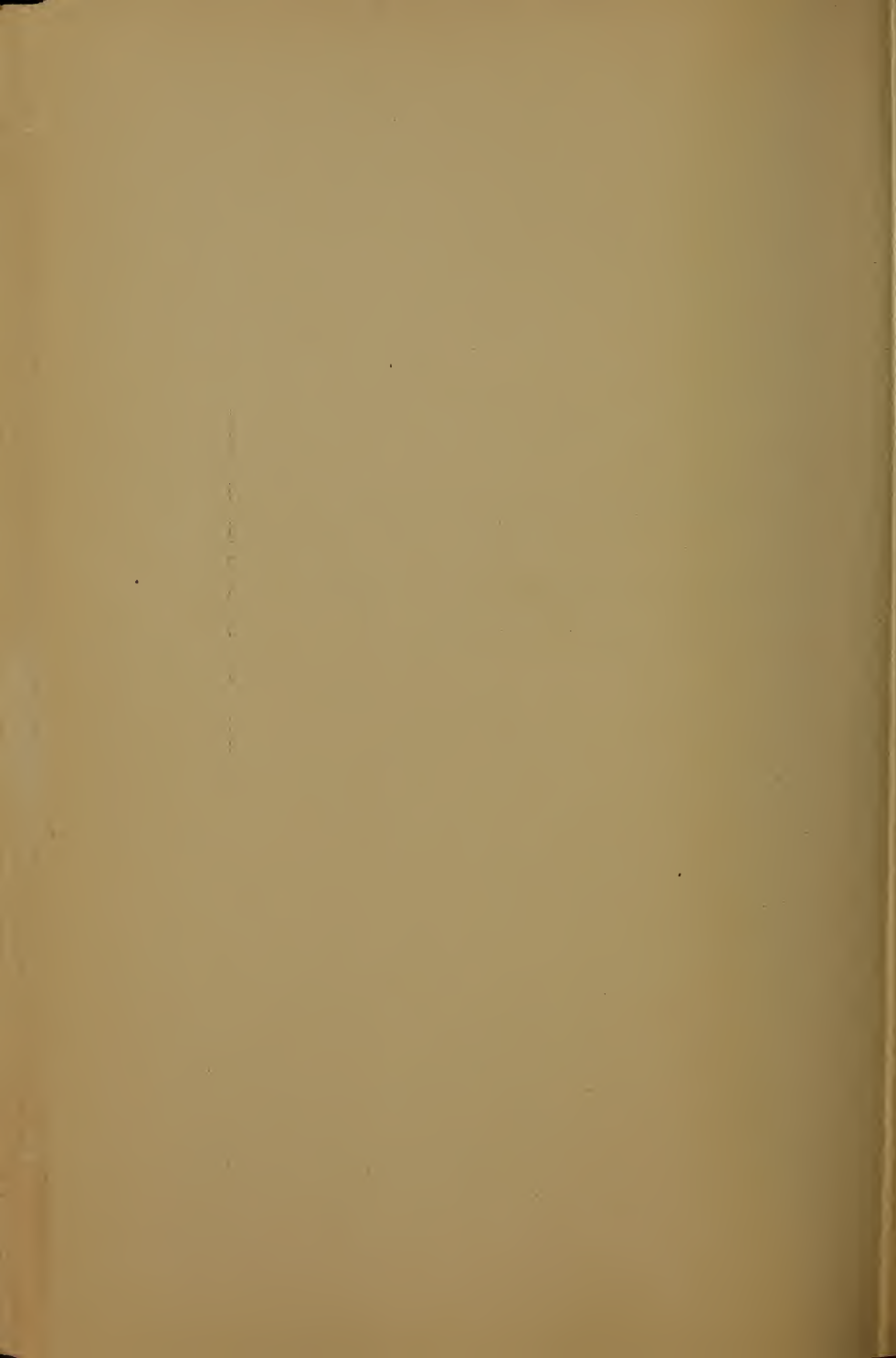
SECOND PICTURE:—*[Mrs. Mayleigh is seated on Mayleigh's knee, and he is looking into her face stroking her hair — Luke up stage looking from window. Christmas Chimes and Chorus of voices.]*



**THE AWAKENING OF
BARBIZON**

A COMEDY-DRAMA IN ONE ACT

BY CLAY M. GREENE.



CHARACTERS

BARBIZON, a Poet.

GUINNERRE, a Soldier.

COITIER, } his Henchmen.
LAVASSE, }

YVONNE LACOURS, a Young Widow.

NOTE.—As this little play represents no particular epoch or chapter of History, the time, place and costumes may be selected to suite the tastes of its producers.



THE AWAKENING OF BARBIZON

SCENE.—*The courtyard and garden of an old Castle, perhaps in Britainny. The Castle occupies the right of the stage, and has a large entrance door, about which is a balcony outside of a window. A high stone wall crosses the stage at back, in the centre of which is an arch and ornamental barred gate. Beyond this gate is a warm landscape, suffused with the light of early summer. At rise of the curtain, Yvonne Lacours is discovered seated on a stone bench to the right of centre, and Barbizon is seated at her feet reading from a manuscript.]*

Barbizon. “Then, rousing from the stupor of inaction,

And stirred to valour by his lady’s scorn,
He woke to mad impulses, which, before,
She ne’er had thought could stir his sluggish blood.

So, without even saying, ‘By your leave,’
He caught Madame Coquette close to his breast,

Bore her enraged and shrieking to his steed,
 Rode with her to his Castle in a wood,
 And kept her prisoner there, until at last,
 Moved by his rash and reckless impudence,
 She frowned no more and yielded to his suit."

Yvonne. Is that the end?

Barbizon. Of that Canto.

Yvonne. Preposterous!

Barbizon. Why?

Yvonne. Oh, wildest flight of fancy! Sure all poets are mad as delirium.

Barbizon. Then at last you grant that I am a poet.

Yvonne. So long as there are some fools who print your ravings, and others who pay their good money to read them, what matter if I approve or no?

Barbizon. To me, everything, fair one. Discouragement from you would turn my ink to water, my pen to sand.

Yvonne. You may call it encouragement if you like, but your,—well, say poem,—of,—what name have you given this latest atrocity?

Barbizon. How is it atrocious, either in the inspiration or the telling of it?

Yvonne. Oh, the telling's well enough.

Barbizon [*rising*]. Then my poor bantling is not to be strangled at its birth. I call it "The Abduction."

Yvonne. No man would dare presume so far as

this hero, nor ever lived there woman who could be so rudely bullied into love.

Barbizon. Nay, now, my heroine may be a false ideal perhaps, but not the man. Hundreds have been ten-fold more reckless for love.

Yvonne. Would you?

Barbizon. I have no horse, lady,—no castle in a wood.

Yvonne. But if you had them,—what then?

Barbizon. This hero was not fashioned after a poor Steward who is dependent upon his lady's patience and bounty.

Yvonne. That answers not my question. If you had them, I ask.

Barbizon. Well, then, if I had a horse and castle in a wood, and if there were a lady who had scorned me as often as this one did her lover,—*[pauses for a moment]*. Yes, I think I would dare presume even further than he. But you have not scorned me like that.

Yvonne *[with some indignation]*. Oh, I have.

Barbizon. Never!

Yvonne *[rising]*. I say I have!

Barbizon. Believe me, you never did.

Yvonne. Surely twenty times. *[Walking over to the right.]*

Barbizon *[following her]*. I have not pleaded my suit that many times.

Yvonne. Well, then, perhaps fifteen,—ten on my oath!

Barbizon [*tapping the manuscript with his finger*]. But never once like this!

Yvonne. Come, sir, how did I refuse you then?

Barbizon. Why with a "no" on your pretty lips, and a lure in your eyes that said, "But come again, teasing sir!"

Yvonne. Was ever man so impertinent!

Barbizon. Thousands. It's always so when determined man wooes a coquette.

Yvonne [*beginning now to become very angry*]. So, sirrah! It's a coquette you would have me now?

Barbizon. Nay, I would not have you so. Heaven forbid!

Yvonne. Tell me, pray, if you can. However, whenever, and in whatever way am I a coquette?

Barbizon. Ha! Lady, it would take me too long.

Yvonne. I command you! [*Stamping her foot imperiously*.] Obey me, sir!

Barbizon. Oh, then, since you insist upon it,—the shame be on your own head.

Yvonne. Shame, sir, shame?

Barbizon. Why, there should be shame at your very perversity of mind. How are you a coquette? In every way. When? Always. In what? Everything. When you bid me good morning, your eyes flash wicked, mischievous shafts at me; when I lift you into your saddle there's devilish coquetry in the voice that thanks me; if you condescend to

bid me to dinner when you are lonely, you smile archly with the soup, tell me of your loneliness with the roast, and smirk coyly over every stage of dessert and coffee.

Yvonne [*her anger still rising*]. Smirk! You impertinent,—smirk!

Barbizon. Like a schoolgirl with her first calf lover. And at bedtime —

Yvonne. Stop! Only Heaven knows what you'll accuse me of by bedtime. You shall insult me no longer,—nay, not even serve me longer. I'll get another Steward.

Barbizon. You could not. There's not another poor gentleman in all Britainny, who could abide your shifting humours.

Yvonne [*her temper now at its height*]. A Spitfire, eh? A common scold!

Barbizon. Ah, no common one, believe me.

Yvonne. A vixen,—a termagant!

Barbizon. Ay, all four,—God forgive you!

Yvonne. Leave my sight!

Barbizon. Nay, I would not rob you of that.

Yvonne. Leave my house!

Barbizon. Gladly, for without you I would not have it for a gift.

Yvonne [*pointing*]. There's the gate!

Barbizon. I've often noticed it. Rude, grotesque, villainous. Who ever designed it?

Yvonne. Open it and take the road at once. Anywhere, so long as it is far from here.

Barbizon. Ah, lady, the road to you I had far rather leave where it is.

Yvonne. Another word of this tap-room wit and I'll call my lackeys!

Barbizon. You have none. You discharged every idle varlet of them this morning.

Yvonne. Ah! [*Shrieking with rage, she sinks upon the seat and weeps hysterically.*]

Barbizon. Thank Heaven, it's all over.

Yvonne. What's all over?

Barbizon. When woman weeps she surrenders.

Yvonne. You shall see that I have not surrendered. I'll waste no more words with you — go, go, go!

Barbizon [*resolutely*]. No,— no — no!

Yvonne [*changing her manner to that of pleading sweetness*]. Please go, Barbizon.

Barbizon. That's better — much better, and so, farewell. [*He turns toward the gate, when Coitier and Lavasse appear outside. Coitier, who is very fat, carries the carcass of a stag on his shoulders, while Lavasse, who is very small, and thin, carries a wicker hamper.*] You have visitors.

Yvonne. Call my gatekeeper.

Barbizon. You have none. You discharged him.

Yvonne. Can you not open it? [*Coitier knocks at the gate.*]

Barbizon. Easily, but you've not asked me.

Yvonne. Open the gate!

Barbizon. I must not be commanded. I'm discharged, too.

Yvonne [*very suavely*]. Don't keep my visitors waiting. Please open the gate, Barbizon.

Barbizon. Much better again. [*Goes to the gate and opens it, smiling with good humour. Coitier and Lavasse enter, the former staggering under the weight of the stag he is carrying. Arriving at centre of the stage, he drops it with a sigh of relief.*]

Coitier. Whew! It's nearly time in all conscience. If that stag weighs not more than I, I'll swallow it without cooking or seasoning.

Yvonne. What is it, my good man?

Coitier. Why, lady, slim Lavasse here carries nothing but a hamper, that a puny child would not stagger under, whilst poor Coitier, already groaning under the weight of his own fat, is compelled to shoulder this. [*Pointing to the stag.*]

Barbizon. The lady would know the purpose of your coming. Your name is Coitier, you say?

Coitier. Ay, Jacques Coitier, companion and Lieutenant to Colonel Guinnerre, who presents assurance of his profound regard, and prays that the lady Yvonne accept as a gift this appetizing trophy of the chase.

Barbizon [*aside, showing signs of jealousy*]. Guinnerre!

Lavasse. Likewise, lady, these silks and laces, — spoils from the last incursion into Spain. [*He*

places the hamper beside her, opens it, and she looks into it with much interest.]

Yvonne. And even in the face of battle he thought of me!

Lavasse. In battle or bivouac, lady, you never leave his thoughts.

Coitier. Nor anything else. Heart, brain, soul and body are all gone out to you, and were their mistress — forgive me — not so beautiful, I could almost say I'm sick of hearing her very name.

Yvonne [*acknowledging the compliment with a bow, and looking into the hamper*]. Rare treasures every one of them. Look, Barbizon.

Barbizon [*petulantly*]. I'm not a judge of laces.

Yvonne. But these priceless fabrics —

Barbizon. Loot is always so, beyond cost or tribute. He stole them in Spain and smuggled them into France.

Coitier. He'll tweak you by the nose when I tell him that.

Barbizon. I'll do worse for yours unless you take that offending carcass to the kitchen.

Yvonne. Call my cook, Barbizon.

Barbizon. You have no cook.

Yvonne. In that case you —

Barbizon. Oh, no! You discharged me some time ago.

Coitier. We're not so proud. We'll remove it

if it offend this gallant with the sensitive nose. Come, Lavasse, it's your turn now.

Lavasse. Nay, I caught a lumbago here last night. [*Putting his hand to a shoulder*]. But I'll help you.

Coitier. Come on, shirking swine! I'm glad even to get that much from you. [*Lavasse assists him in lifting the stag to his shoulders, and he struggles with it over toward the door of the castle, followed by Lavasse! He then turns toward Barbizon.*] Offensive, eh? He'll tell that gentle and sensitive nose of yours another story when he's roasted. [*Lavasse and Coitier enter the castle.*]

Yvonne. Now sirrah, for you.

Barbizon. No. For me nothing but farewell.

Yvonne. Where are you going?

Barbizon. You have commanded me to take the road and I obey. I wish you joy of the hermit life you have chosen. [*Going up to the gate.*]

Yvonne. Will you leave me, a defenceless woman, alone in this great cheerless castle with no one near me but those dreadful bravos?

Barbizon. It was your command, lady.

Yvonne. Then I recall it. Remain.

Barbizon. For one thing only will I remain.

[*Coming down.*]

Yvonne. I listen.

Barbizon. That I become your husband.

Yvonne. I have no wish to marry, Barbizon.

Barbizon. To marry Barbizon, no. Would you accord Guinnerre the same reply?

Yvonne. I cannot say,—perhaps not.

Barbizon. Why should you not? Tell me that.

Yvonne. I will then. Woman admires the arm that is strong, the heart that is brave, the nature that is reckless. Guinnerre has all of these. A man of courage; a hero who has braved death a hundred times; a soldier captain who has won scores of great battles, while you,—Ha, ha, ha! Poor Barbizon!

Barbizon [*bitterly and with warmth*]. Ay, poor Barbizon. Poor, indeed. What is Barbizon? Only what your fickle temper has made him. That is all, Yvonne Lacours. Your lackey, your equerry, your gardener and your gatekeeper. Your cook, your scullery wench, your laundress and your lady's maid. I do not like the work,—I have no time for half of it, and so, leave your service.

Yvonne. I beg of you stay. You are none of these, but my faithful steward and adviser.

Barbizon. Faithful always, and efficient, too, was I not?

Yvonne. I could trust no one else in your office. Positively, I refuse to exist here without you, Barbizon.

Barbizon. You refuse to marry me. I will not exist here without that. Learn now what I have

never told you before. I became Steward of your estates. Because my poverty demanded it? Ah, no, Yvonne Lacours. It was because your witch's smile lured me here, away from my castle in a wood, that is no meaner than this of yours. But I was tempted and bound myself to you to be near you; to show that in time I might prove myself worthy of a higher and holier place in your service and your heart. Well, I have failed.

Yvonne. In one thing only, my Barbizon. Have I not often told you of that? You write wondrous tales, full of mighty deeds of valour and yet perform none. You wear a sword that I have never known to leave its sheath, and when you were called into the field to fight for the honour of Britainny, you paid another to march in your place and bleed for you.

Barbizon [*jealously.*] But Guinnerre —

Yvonne. Is everything that you are not, or I would have been yours long ago.

Barbizon. Ha, ha! I thought you but a coquette and hoped on, because coquetry is an ephemeral thing that dies of its own appetites, like too many sweets make children ill. But you were worse than that. An idol worshipper blind to the shams of romance; a gullible weakling who seeks no ideals save on the fields of cruel conquest; who mistakes bravado for worth and fustian for manhood. Such a woman, lady, has no charm for me, and I revoke my pledge to win you.

Yvonne [*pleadingly*]. Ah, Barbizon!

Barbizon. No, all is ended now. I will remain as your protector if you need that service of me, but I have ceased to be your lover.

Yvonne [*as if struck by a sudden thought that pleases her*]. You are jealous of Guinnerre!

Barbizon. A moment since I was, but now I care not how rudely or braggartly he woos you. [*Guinnerre appears outside the gate.*]

Yvonne. He has not tried to woo me yet. [*Guinnerre knocks at the gate.*]

Barbizon. All in good time, fair mistress. He is knocking at the gate now, on the way to your heart, and the key hangs by its lentil.

Yvonne. Guinnerre here?

Barbizon. Yes, mark how gladly I clear the way for him. [*He opens the gate and Guinnerre enters. He is a good looking soldier, full of swagger and bombast.*]

Guinnerre [*tauntingly to Barbizon*]. So, my soaring poet has been promoted to the more important rank of gatekeeper, eh? I wish you long success in it, but you begin badly,—you're too slow. [*Sees Yvonne.*] Ah, forgive me that I jested in your sweet presence, Yvonne. But this clod gave me no hint that I was near you. I kiss your priceless hand. [*Kisses her hand, and Barbizon frowns.*]

Barbizon. Any orders for the night, madame?

Yvonne. No, Barbizon. Your thoughts concerning orders are always mine.

Barbizon. I thank you,—good night. [*Goes to the castle door.*]

Yvonne. Good night, Barbizon.

Barbizon [*addressing Guinnerre, who pays no attention to him*]. Good night, Colonel.

Yvonne [*to Guinnerre*]. He bids you good night.

Guinnerre. Have I your permission to acknowledge the compliment in my own way? [*She bows acquiescence and he goes over to Barbizon.*] Listen, Sirrah! [*Barbizon does not notice him.*] Are you aware that I am addressing you?

Barbizon. Perfectly.

Guinnerre. You did not seem so.

Barbizon. Concealment of my emotions and humours is one of my most finished accomplishments, monsieur—I should have said, Colonel.

Guinnerre. Are you making a fool of me?

Barbizon. I have no wish to interfere with your own fine success in that direction, Monsieur,—I should say, Colonel.

Guinnerre. I've a mind to pull your nose for that.

Barbizon. Refrain, I beg of you. I trust that you will not subject me to so painful a humiliation.

Yvonne [*who has been regarding Barbizon's*

complaisance with surprise]. No man would so receive such an insult.

Guinnerre [to *Barbizon*, with great scorn]. Poor worm, I spare you!

Barbizon. Thank you. [*Then hissing between his teeth*]. But if you will say that to me out of her presence, I'll cut off both your ears! [*Hurries into the Castle and Guinnerre bursts into a fit of laughter.*]

Guinnerre. Ha, ha, ha, ha! Did you hear him? He actually threatened me,—me, *Guinnerre*!

Yvonne. Not he.

Guinnerre. Threatened to cut off my ears.

Yvonne. Colonel! [*This with some slight show of alarm.*]

Guinnerre. Have no fear, I beg of you. For your own gracious sake I will be merciful. But why consider such trifles in a presence like this? Something I have awaited in constant anxiety for months. You received my gifts?

Yvonne. Yes, it was thoughtful of you to remember me.

Guinnerre. I do that always, fair one, no matter what the terror of my situation. For instance, when I killed that fierce wounded stag with my sword, I forgot my own danger in the thought that it might grace your larder. When I gained those fabrics by right of conquest, I fought for them the harder, hoping that I might yet live to see you

wear them. I have grown weary of battle and conquest, Yvonne, for long ago I won my spurs a dozen times. But always the dream that one day I might receive praise from you, spurred me on to greater and more reckless daring.

Yvonne. You risked your life for so small a reward as that?

Guinnerre. For nothing more,—except —

Yvonne. Except? —

Guinnerre. Hope of fulfilment of my most earnest prayer to one day win your hand. [*She hangs her head.*] You are silent. Is it then hopeless? You do not answer, Yvonne. Has rumour spoken truly, then,—that you are soon to wed this poet-steward of yours?

Yvonne. No, it is not true.

Guinnerre. And there is hope for me?

Yvonne [*after a pause, looking into his eyes*]. Yes, there is hope.

Guinnerre. Then, why keep me waiting? Why not give me my answer now? I love you, Yvonne, and if I am to hope, surely you are not all indifferent to me.

Yvonne. No.

Guinnerre. Then tell me that I have deserved and won you; that you will be my bride.

Yvonne. I cannot tell you that yet, Guinnerre.

Guinnerre. Ah, why not?

Yvonne. That you shall know, and you are the first to hear it from my lips. I married once, a

gentle kindly man, who won my respect and esteem but never my love. When he died I vowed that if ever I wed again, it must be to a man with a name; — one who has done something greater than other men have done for the world and for me.

Guinnerre. Was it for lack of these that Barbizon failed in his suit.

Yvonne. For that alone. Nothing else he lacks to make me happy.

Guinnerre. And I shall lack nothing at all, Yvonne. It will be my delight to make so blessed a compact. My life risked for yours, with this hand the reward.

Yvonne [*letting him keep her hand for a moment*]. With this hand the reward. [*He covers her hand with kisses, and this is interrupted by a noise from within the castle. Coitier and Lavasse chased by Barbizon, with drawn sword, hurry out of the door.*]

Barbizon. Vagabonds, thieves, vandals!

Coitier. Help, help, help!

Guinnerre [*rising quickly*]. Help from what?

Coitier. Oh, meagre hospitality! Oh, miserly stinginess! But that I were a guest of this fair lady I'd have carved him into veal cutlets!

Lavasse. And but for my lumbago, I'd have done worse than that despite the lady!

Yvonne. Explain, Barbizon.

Barbizon. There is little to explain. I found these two trusty henchmen of Sir Fustian there,

who makes a business of heroism, robbing the larder and drinking your wine.

Yvonne. And you drew your sword on them for this?

Barbizon. It was but now that you chided me because I kept my sword in its sheath. But it was a bloodless affray, like to disappoint you, for I merely gave each of them a spanking with it.

Guinnerre [*to his men*]. And you permitted this?

Coitier. You forget that I am a gentleman, Colonel, and this lady's honoured guest.

Lavasse. And you forget my lumbago.

Yvonne [*to Barbizon*]. You must ask pardon of these gentlemen.

Barbizon. With all my heart. [*To Coitier and Lavasse.*] I apologise most humbly, gentlemen, and am truly sorry that I forgot my sword has a point to it.

Coitier [*with a comical bow*]. Don't mention it.

Barbizon [*also bowing with mock humility*]. I will not again, believe me. The next time I will treat my tyro of a blade more leniently and run you through with it.

Coitier. Do you think my Colonel will permit so unequal a fight?

Barbizon. Do you think I shall ask your Colonel's permission?

Guinnerre. Suppose the Colonel were to ask your permission to make the next time,— now?

Barbizon. In that case I could not be so impolite as to refuse you, Monsieur,—I should say, Colonel.

Guinnerre [*drawing his sword*]. Nor I to teach you a lesson.

Barbizon. You can teach me nothing about a sword, impostor!

Guinnerre. Learn something from this, then! [*Makes a pass which Barbizon guards dextrously.*]

Yvonne [*coming between them*]. Stop, gentlemen! How dare you? In my courtyard, in my very presence!

Guinnerre. Forgive me — he provoked it.

Yvonne. Nay, you provoked him.

Barbizon. And did you not see —

Yvonne. Silence, Barbizon!

Barbizon. Yes, my lady.

Yvonne [*to Guinnerre*]. Go, go, my nerves are on edge.

Guinnerre. Your slightest wish, lady, makes me your slave. [*To Barbizon.*] We shall meet soon again.

Barbizon. Sooner, sooner, for Heaven's sake!

Yvonne. Barbizon. [*Stamping her foot.*]

Barbizon. I forgot.

Guinnerre. But I shall not forget.

Barbizon. How good of you! [*Guinnerre signals his men to retire and they disappear through the gate. He goes to Yvonne.*]

Guinnerre [*to Yvonne, overheard by Barbizon*].
You will remember our compact?

Yvonne. How can I ever forget it now, Colonel?

Guinnerre. I kiss your hand. [*Kisses her hand, bows to her curtesy and hurries off through the gate. The stage now begins to darken and changes gradually to pale moonlight.*]

Barbizon [*going to Yvonne*]. What compact have you made with him?

Yvonne. That, sir, is my affair.

Barbizon. You love Guinnerre!

Yvonne. No, I do not.

Barbizon. Then it must follow that you love me.

Yvonne. Not altogether.

Barbizon [*taking her hands impulsively in his*].
Look into my face, Yvonne. Deep into my eyes of truth and tell me that again. Look, I say!

Yvonne. Not so roughly, Barbizon. Shame! Yours are the hands of a bully now,—not a poet's. Let me go and I will tell you!

Barbizon [*releasing her*]. There, then. You love me?

Yvonne. No! [*With a mischievous laugh she hurries into the castle. Barbizon goes over to the stone seat and throws himself upon it in deep dejection. After a short pause Yvonne appears at the door, with a mandolin or some similar instrument, in her hand.*]

Yvonne. Barbizon! [*He does not answer.*]

Barbizon! [*He rouses from his reverie and turns to her.*] We were forgetting something. [*He runs over to her.*] Deep sleep and happy dreams, you know, never come to me without my music. [*She hands him the instrument, which he takes, and at the same time, seizes one of her hands.*]

Barbizon. Yvonne! Have you told me all the truth?

Yvonne [*taking her hand from his*]. Nearly all. [*Disappears into the Castle.*] [*Barbizon goes up to the gate, closes and bars it. Then returns to his seat as before, and begins to strum the instrument listlessly. Yvonne appears on the balcony above the door and calls to him.*] Barbizon! Louder, Barbizon! Moreover, that is not my lullaby. [*He plays another selection louder, and, if desirable, a song might be introduced.*] Good night, Barbizon.

Barbizon. Yvonne, listen to me.

Yvonne. I have already. Your playing was dull, listless, expressionless.

Barbizon. Like yours on my heart.

Yvonne. What say you,—I play upon that?

Barbizon. Always. Morn, noon and night you play upon it, until it has become tuneless and harsh like these strings when the Heavens have rained upon them. I'll submit to no more of it. Man's heart will bear its load of woman's tyranny until it tears apart and bursts into rebellion that will not down. My heart rebels now,—it's burden

has grown too heavy,— good night. [*Goes up to gate.*]

Yvonne. Good night, but not that way, Barbizon. You've shut the gate, and if you open it again, there is no one to close it behind you.

Barbizon. Ah, siren, temptress, witch, devil!

Yvonne. Thou poor child in swaddling clouts; thou foolish boy, thou blindest part of a man!

Barbizon. You love me, Yvonne, yes or no!

Yvonne. Both!

Barbizon. Fiend that you are to tempt me from behind bolts and bars! Say you love me and bid me good night!

Yvonne. One of them I will say — good night!

Barbizon. And is there to be nothing else?

Yvonne. Yes,— this! [*Kisses her hand to him and disappears.*]

Barbizon [*goes up to the gate and looks out between the bars*]. What was that compact with Guinnerre? I think I see figures in the shadows yonder. No, it was only my jealous soul conjuring pictures out of nothing. But if he should return, and dare to so much as place one of his fingers upon her hands, I'll unsheath my sword to some purpose. [*He hurries into the castle, when the slip of an iron bolt is heard behind him. Then Lavasse appears over the top of the wall at the back, draws a ladder after him, places it in the courtyard, and comes down, followed by Coitier.*]

Coitier. Oh, these lovers! A pretty mess we're getting ourselves into helping this one.

Lavasse. But for a thousand louis — remember that.

Coitier. Good enough if there's not to be a funeral. What would be the use of a marble shaft higher than a cathedral, if we had no hand in the spending of the money? [*Guinnerre appears outside the gate.*]

Lavasse. Be still! Our lover has come. [*Coitier opens the gate and Guinnerre enters.*]

Guinnerre. A thousand louis for this night's work remember, and twice as much when Yvonne is my bride.

Coitier. You haven't twice as many sous to your name.

Guinnerre. But my fair lady has them by tens of thousands, locked in the crypts of the old castle here.

Coitier. If in rescuing her from me, you chance to prod me in the chest deep enough, what good will the whole treasure do me?

Guinnerre. There'll be no danger of that,—I know my thrusts too well. Some blood-letting will be necessary,—no more than that.

Coitier and Lavasse [*grimly*]. Thank you.

Guinnerre. Afraid already? Out of the way, then, and I'll hire strangers to assist me.

Coitier. No, no, we'll do it, but how can a man talk of having his blood drawn as though it were a

jet of wine from a cask? [*Lavasse places the ladder against the balcony, and begins to mount it, followed by Coitier, who climbs laboriously.*]

Guinnerre. Have a care that she sound no alarm nor utter a cry, until you have her well down the ladder. [*Hurries off through gate.*]

Coitier. If the lady should happen to be wakeful to-night, and talkative like my wife, Heaven preserve us.

Lavasse. Amen to that! But listen! She snores! [*By this time the men are about to climb over the balustrade of the balcony, when Yvonne is heard to scream from within.*]

Yvonne. Ah! Help, help! Barbizon, Barbizon! [*The two men begin to descend the ladder quickly, and when they are at the bottom, Barbizon enters from the Castle door with drawn sword. He stabs Coitier viciously, who falls near the steps, when he attacks Lavasse, who makes a defence with his sword.*]

Lavasse. Ho, Guinnerre! The man has an arm of steel!

Barbizon [*attacking Lavasse furiously*]. So this is Guinnerre's work, eh? [*He wounds Lavasse, who falls up near the wall, and Guinnerre hurries through the gate and engages him. While they are fighting Yvonne enters.*]

Yvonne. What does this mean? Barbizon! Guinnerre!

Guinnerre [*talking as he fences*]. It means

that this romancer of yours, jealous of me, has hired my men to attack you, so that he may rescue you and claim your hand.

Barbizon. Your life for that lie! Take that, and that! [*Makes several vicious thrusts, which Guinnerre parries.*]

Guinnerre. Not yet!

Yvonne [*seeing Coitier and bending over him*]. Who is this?

Guinnerre. Coitier murdered, or he could prove me true!

Yvonne. No, he breathes. [*Shaking Coitier.*] Speak, Coitier, why have you done this?

Coitier [*in great pain*]. Oh, mad fool that you are, Guinnerre, to lose a good friend for a madder fool of a woman!

Barbizon. It was you then! [*Attacks Guinnerre more viciously than ever, running him through with his sword, and he falls up near the gate. Yvonne regards the scene with horror.*] My sword is unsheathed at last, Yvonne. Are you satisfied?

Yvonne. Oh, Barbizon! Where can I go to hide away from the havoc I have wrought?

Barbizon. There is but one place in all the world for you now, Yvonne.

Yvonne. Where, where?

Barbizon. Here on my heart! [*She rushes into his arms.*]

CURTAIN.



Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: Sept. 2009

Preservation Technologies

A WORLD LEADER IN COLLECTIONS PRESERVATION

111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111



DOBBS BROS.
LIBRARY BINDING

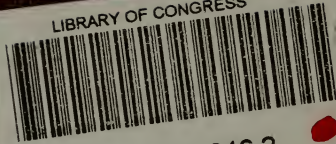
ST AUGUSTINE

FLA.



32084

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 004 021 246 2